

2021 Baltimore County Redistricting Commission

Meeting Minutes – April 15, 2021 Organizational Meeting

This was the first meeting of the Commission. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held via virtual webconference. The meeting started at 3:06 p.m., with 16 attendees. During the meeting, a total of 20 attendees were present.

Council Secretary Tom Bostwick greeted all attendees and invited Councilmembers in attendance to give opening remarks. Opening remarks were given by Councilmembers Bevins, Marks, Patoka, and Jones. Mr. Bostwick then introduced himself, Assistant Legislative Counsel Adam Phillips, and Council Administrator Chris Belcastro as the Council Central Staff and support staff for the Commission. He then gave opening remarks.

The Commission members introduced themselves and gave opening remarks in the following order. Jim Almon, Sam Neuberger, Aaron Plymouth, Sophia Montgomery, and Bob Latshaw.

Tom Bostwick introduced Rob Livermore, the GIS Manager from the Office of Information Technology (OIT). Mr. Livermore gave opening remarks and introduced Christine Lupton as a GIS specialist from OIT. Mr. Bostwick asked Mr. Livermore whether there have been changes in mapping technology since the 2010 redistricting process. Mr. Livermore responded that the County has moved to a web based GIS platform that can supply the Commission with secure portals to create web based map editing and real time analysis. This web based GIS platform will also enable interactive dashboards that the Commission may share with the public.

Councilman Patoka requested Mr. Livermore give information on the type of data the Commission should expect to receive from the U.S. Census Bureau. Mr. Livermore explained that the Commission should expect to receive population and demographic data broken down by Census blocks and voting precincts. Mr. Bostwick provided additional comments.

Mr. Latshaw gave comments on his experience as a member of the 2010 Redistricting Commission, specifically regarding the 2010 Commission's hesitancy to split voting precincts. Mr. Latshaw also commented on the issue of the creation of a minority district during the 2010 process and whether there would be requests to create another minority district based on demographic changes in the County since 2010.

Sam Neuberger asked Mr. Bostwick to discuss when the Commission may receive the Census data. Mr. Bostwick commented that the 2020 Census was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Census Bureau is currently estimating that it will not complete its transmittal of all Census population numbers until September 30, 2021. That data is received by the Maryland Department of Planning, which in turn transmits the data to the Baltimore County Department of Planning.

Mr. Bostwick further detailed that the Commission must hold at least three public hearings and that the Commission's report and recommendations must be submitted to the Council no later than October 15, 2021. The 2010 Commission chose to hold their public hearings early in the process and Mr. Bostwick suggested that the current Commission may choose to similarly hold their public hearings in May or June. Mr. Bostwick commented that the Commission may still gain valuable insight from community members regardless of the Census data. Councilmembers Bevens and Marks commented on examples of public input during the 2010 Commission's hearings that proved formative during the process, specifically in regard to splitting or reforming communities.

Mr. Bostwick discussed the history of the current redistricting process, specifically the formation and report of the Murphy Commission. Mr. Bostwick discussed Section 207 of the County Charter that mandates that the Councilmanic districts be compact, contiguous, substantially equal in population, and give due regard to the current natural, geographic, and community boundaries. Adam Phillips gave additional comments in more detail on the legal interpretations of these requirements.

Bob Latshaw asked Mr. Bostwick about the independence of Commission members. Mr. Bostwick responded that while there has been some separation between the Councilmembers and the Commission during previous redistricting cycles, the redistricting process is inherently political and Councilmembers are not prohibited from giving their opinion on potential changes to district boundaries. However, Councilmembers may not direct certain recommendations. Also, Councilmembers have the ultimate decision on redistricting in the adoption of district boundaries.

Mr. Latshaw also asked Mr. Bostwick about Commission members discussing the redistricting process with community associations and other outside groups. Mr. Bostwick responded that previously, Commission members have chosen not to individually discuss the process with outside groups, but nothing explicitly prohibits it.

Mr. Bostwick remarked that the 2010 Commission chose to elect a chair to lead discussion and that the current Commission may choose, but it not required, to do the same.

Sam Nueberger asked Rob Livermore about alternative population or demographic data that may be available for the Commission to consider while the Commission awaits the Census data. Mr. Livermore responded that GIS can provide the Commission with data from the American Community Survey, a five year rolling national population survey conducted by the Census Bureau. GIS can also provide data from the development process on housing units, data gathered for the Master Plan, and other Planning Department data. Aaron Plymouth suggested that the Commission request data from the Baltimore County Liquor Board, which must maintain accurate population data to assess the number of liquor licenses that may be issued.

Closing comments were given by Tom Bostwick and Councilmembers Patoka and Bevens. The meeting ended at 4:06 p.m.